

STATE OF THE STATE RESPONSE

House Democratic Leader Pro Tempore Geraldine Thompson

Tuesday, March 3, 2009

Greetings Floridians!

I am State Representative Geraldine F. Thompson, and I represent House District 39 in Central Florida.

As the House Democratic Leader Pro Tempore, I am grateful for the opportunity to speak to you about the state of our state, and to respond to Governor Crist's message.

Let me come straight to the point.

We are in perilous times.

Florida is feeling the effects of the national economic recession to a greater degree than most other states.

I know you are cutting back and stretching dollars to get through a tight spell. Businesses are struggling, and many are laying off workers. People are worried...Worried about finding another job...And worried about paying their bills.

In these dire times, Florida House Democrats understand that our citizens want solutions and not political posturing from elected officials.

In this tough economy, we need to make tough choices. We'll need to collaborate and listen to one another.

Our challenges---**FLORIDA's CHALLENGES**---need more than one-party solutions. The people need Democrats at the negotiating table alongside Republicans. And we're going to fight to get those opportunities.

We know help is needed.

Last year, sadly, more than TWO-HUNDRED-FIFTY-THOUSAND Floridians lost their jobs, and countless more may be laid off this year.

Thousands have lost their places of residence due to home foreclosures. And nearly every property owner has been stunned by deep dips in home values.

Uncertainties abound about families' ability to finance their children's college education. Many are frightened by having seen their retirement accounts wither.

And shamefully, more than 3.6 million Floridians are without health insurance. That's one-fifth of our state's population without coverage.

What's worse, we still do not know the extent of the economic chaos that awaits us. There's concern that this

may become the worst economic contraction since the Great Depression.

But despite these woes, this is no time for fear. Rather, we believe this is a time for **COURAGE** and **HOPE**. Difficult times like these require historic levels of cooperation---**BIPARTISAN COOPERATION**.

There are 44 Democrats in the Florida House of Representatives. We are **ALL** eager to participate and provide solutions.

Democrats in the Legislature will seek to use these next nine weeks of business in Tallahassee to redeem hope. We are confident that there will be a healthier, better prepared and more resilient Florida than what exists today.

We are heartened that a new president and a new year are bringing the promise of change and opportunity.

We know that Floridians have faced challenging times before--some much worse than what we're going through now. Wars. The Great Depression. Natural disasters. And, at times, falling short in our pursuit of equality, tolerance and social justice for all people.

As we've done before, we will meet today's challenges by not showing cowardice. We will do so by ensuring that we have a better educated workforce. We will **THRIVE** by ensuring that we protect our natural and cultural landscape...and by investing in public safety without sacrificing the basic health needs of our people.

In these difficult times, many are naturally skeptical of the ability of their government to solve the very real problems they face in their daily lives.

But to restore confidence and to turn unemployment checks into paychecks, we **MUST INVEST** in our human infrastructure.

One of our top priorities remains education. Only by creating the best trained, the best skilled, the best-educated workforce in America will we be able to create the employment opportunities that are this state's future.

And that means finding **POLITICAL COURAGE** to consider raising revenues---but only so long as it doesn't hurt the middle class and those already struggling with lower incomes.

It also means having courage to say “**NO**” to more

reductions in state spending on our public schools, colleges and universities. And it means maintaining our commitment to universal pre-kindergarten education.

Of course, some may ask if this is the right time to invest in education and human services.

Friends. The question is, if not now, when?

Today, there are more than **FOURTEEN-BILLION** dollars coming from Washington, D.C. with Florida's name on it. These are monies to help cover **UNINSURED CHILDREN** and adult's basic health coverage. It's money to provide for their education. It's money to help grow jobs.

It's money that President Barack Obama and Congress have envisioned to give a lift to states like ours. It's money that **FLORIDA TAXPAYERS** have already sent to Washington.

Florida House Democrats applaud Governor Charlie Crist for showing courage in writing a budget that puts federal stimulus dollars to work.

Using these economic recovery funds will be a **WIN** for everyone----especially our children, the uninsured, and Floridians worried about their jobs.

JOBS are the lifeblood of our economy. When jobs are threatened and businesses shutter, communities suffer and people lose hope.

To turn this economy around, we must take immediate action on our shared goals of putting Floridians back to work.

If we educate our children and keep them healthy, and make sure there are good jobs for their families, Floridians will thrive.

Understandably, the federal economic recovery package is not a panacea or a silver-bullet solution to all that ails Florida. These are one-time funds.

Some states may use these monies to **PUSH BACK** problems two years—or some states will turn down these funds.

Florida should not do this. We **NEED** these dollars to soften the blow of the recession, and to be a bridge to better days.

We can focus on the **BASICS**---education, health care, good jobs—so that our state is positioned well for when the economy breaks through again.

Let us all be proud of our great state of Florida. Let's use our resources and the power and grace of our state to endure and to thrive. Let's improve our schools, grow jobs and provide for the health needs of our children and families.

Let's not let our challenges defeat us. We have hope for a bright future.

On behalf of the Florida House Democratic Caucus, I thank you.

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